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Love Gives Everything

The Trinity as Ground of Mission, Interculturality, Inculturation, and JPIC

Lecture given to the SVD Community in Rome, January 15, 2022, at the occasion of the feast day of the Founder of Society of Divine Word, Arnold Janssen (1837-1909).

As you see from the title of my presentation, it might look like this essay should really be *four* essays! However, it is important to see that all four of these topics are interrelated, and in a kind of Trinitarian *perichoresis*—that great interpersonal movement or “dance” among Holy Mystery, Holy Word, and Holy Spirit—they explain one another, enrich one another, play with one another. Like the Trinitarian persons, we can focus on these distinct topics, but we only can fully understand them when we grasp them all together. They are each one and all, different ways of understanding and participating in the truth that Love Gives Everything!¹

Love Gives Everything! What a wonderful way of expressing the inexpressible reality of our Triune God, and our own participation in God’s life of mission! That God is Love Giving Everything points to the metaphor that God is a verb, a mystery, as Gloria has shown us, of flourishing relationship, a loving that moves out of itself and draws others in—humans, animals, every particle of creation. Theology in its own stuttering way tells us that the divine “persons” are persons not in their own right, but only insofar as the participate in relationship—with one another and with everything that exists. And so it is with us. The famous African proverb tells us that “I am because we are,” and that is true because we are made in God’s image. As

Richard Rohr has put it beautifully, God is not being but *interbeing*, the Trinity is not the dancers, but the dance itself.² And so it is with us and everything. As images of God, we exist as interbeings, caught up in the dance. Everything is interrelated, as contemporary scientists, especially physicists, tell us.³

The triune God is Love Giving Everything, “before” the world’s creation—again speaking metaphorically—from its first nanosecond, every nanosecond thereafter, and every nanosecond into the future. New Testament scholar Michael J. Gorman reflects on the hymn that Paul quotes in the letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), suggesting that the English of the first line might be rendered both as “*Although* he was in the form of God ...” and “*Because* he was in the form of God.” The former—“although”—is what he calls the text’s *surface* structure; the latter—“because”—he calls the text’s *deep* structure. “*Although* he was in the form of God,” points to how “Christ acted differently than ‘normal’ gods act.” “*Because* he was in the form of God” points to the fact that “Christ acted as he did because that is the character of true divinity.”⁴ Perhaps it would not be out of place to paraphrase Thomas Aquinas as quoted by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “it is proper to God to empty Godself, through which God’s

¹ This essay was originally written for a Symposium on the Trinity, sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), July 27-29, 2021. The title is inspired by the document “Love Gives Everything,” Directional Statement, School Sisters of Notre Dame, 24th General Chapter, October 24, 2017.

² Richard Rohr, Disk One of *The Divine Dance: Exploring the Mystery of the Trinity*, 2004.

³ See Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* (LS), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, 138. In her paper at the SSND Symposium, Gloria Schaab quotes Heesoon Bai and Hartley Banack, “‘To See a World in a Grain of Sand’: Complexity Ethics and Moral Education,” *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education* 3:1 (2006): 5–20 at 9–10.

⁴ Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 119 and 106, note 6.

omnipotence is manifested in the greatest degree.”⁵ God is Love Giving Everything: Holy Mystery emptying Godself into creation through the Word made flesh, through the gentle and tender power of the Holy Spirit—so that “the darkness of sin and the night of unbelief” might “vanish before the light of the Word and the Spirit of grace.”⁶

It is this Love Giving Everything, this “Verb in which all beings participate, move, and have their being. ... not limited by any object but soaring everywhere,”⁷ that is the ground of the church’s mission, its commitment to inculturation and interculturality, and its commitment in mission to justice and peace. It will be the exploration of this ground on which this presentation will focus.



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Mission

In early January 2021, one of our theology students in the formation house where I live, Roger Kyaw Thu from Myanmar, offered a short reflection at our daily Eucharist (which we are so lucky to have during this time of pandemic!) on the day’s gospel, Mk 1:14-20, the call of Simon and Andrew and James and John. Roger began by wondering why Jesus called disciples at all, since, being God, God

could do it all by Godself. But then he said, perhaps the reason was that God *liked* to work with others, and so involved others by calling them as disciples. God *could* have done it by Godself, but God *chose* to do it with others. It was a really lovely, faith-filled reflection, and very well done.

This fine reflection, however, stimulated me to think in a different direction, and push a bit more daringly. I was already thinking about writing the text of this presentation, and so my creative juices began to flow. Perhaps, I began to think, that Jesus chose disciples to help him with his work was no caprice; it was not something that he simply decided to do just because he wanted to. Jesus, as God, *could not have done it by himself*, because God *can never can do anything by God’s self*. This is the point of the Trinity. To *be* God is *never to be alone*. And so, in calling disciples, Jesus reveals the true nature of God as a communion of persons, a communion-in-mission. The Holy Mystery that is God empties Godself by uttering the Word, the breathing forth and the breathing back of which is the Holy Spirit. God is never alone. God is Love Giving Everything.

And because God *is* never alone God never *acts* alone. It is God’s nature to be a partner. When God creates, what is created becomes a partner, invited to freely participate in God’s continuously creating work. As Elizabeth Johnson writes, “it is if at the Big Bang the Spirit gave the natural world a push saying, “Go have an adventure, see what you can become.”⁸ When God reveals Godself, those to whom God reveals Godself become partners, for revelation is not simply the communication of knowledge, but an offer of friendship, as Vatican II puts it, an offer to share God’s very life.⁹ When God works to heal and redeem the world from the power of evil and sin, those whom God heals and redeems become partners in healing and

5 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, question 30, ad 4, Respondeo. See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG),

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, 37.

6 This is the prayer of St. Arnold Janssen, the founder of the Society of the Divine Word, to which I belong.

7 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 239. Johnson, of course, is alluding to Acts 17:28.

8 Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 156.

9 Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (DV), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, 2.

redemption. Holy Mystery, the Love that Gives Everything, is revealed in the world through the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, who is anointed by the Spirit at his baptism to “bring good news to the poor, ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18).

Here we see the essence of God’s mission and the church’s mission as rooted in Trinitarian life. The overflowing fountain of love that is the deepest reality of God’s mystery, sends the Word into the world by the power of the Spirit.¹⁰ Jesus of Nazareth, that incarnate word, gathers disciples, and after his death—by which he loved his disciples “to the end” (Jn 13:1)—bestowed on them the same Spirit that had anointed him and had raised him from the dead (Jn 20:22-23; Rom 8:11). In this way the mission of God is shared with the church, and so the church is truly “missionary by its very nature,” a “community of missionary disciples.”¹¹

The Eastern tradition of Christian theology talks about how Christians share God’s life and mission as *theosis* or deification. There are strong Pauline (e.g. adoption) and Johannine (vine and branches) roots to this idea, but perhaps the main text to which Eastern Christians refer is that of 2Pet 1:4: God has given us the power to “become participants in the divine nature.” Gregory Nazianzus, for example, speaks of the Christian as a “*zoon theoumenon*,” or “an animal that is being deified.”¹² One could get the impression that the process of *theosis* is something that is only personal, spiritual. Michael J. Gorman, however, insists that *theosis* is always *missional theosis*.¹³

Baptism plunges us into the very life of the Triune God, who is a missionary God, and so to share God’s life is to participate in God’s very mission. “Discipleship,” says the World Council of Churches’ “The Arusha Call to Discipleship,” “is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1Thessalonians 3:2). In what the church’s early theologians called ‘theosis’ or deification, we share God’s grace by sharing God’s mission.”¹⁴ For Orthodox theology, missiologist Petros Vassiliadis insists, “human nature was never considered as a closed, autonomous, and static entity; its very existence was always determined by its *relationship* with God. Guided, therefore, by a vision of how to ‘know’ God, and ‘participate’ in His life, Christian witness is closely connected with the notion of a *synergetic* theology of *theosis* or *deification*.”¹⁵ Romanian Orthodox theologian Cristian Sonea sees a strong connection between Eucharist and a missionary understanding of *theosis*.¹⁶ Mission and its Trinitarian ground is intimately connected to the other three topics that I will reflect on in this presentation, and it will be more and more developed as we reflect on each of them. What I want to stress here, however, is that God, in God’s triune nature as Love Giving Everything, incorporates us into the divine life so intimately that we become ourselves partners in that Love that Gives Everything.

10 See Vatican Council II, Decree on Missionary Activity (AG),

[11 AG 2; EG, 24. *You Are Sent*, Constitution of the School Sisters of Notre Dame \(1986\), Prologue; I.2.](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html, 2.</p>
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12 Kallistos Ware, *Orthodox Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012), 44.

13 Michael J. Gorman, *Abide and Go: Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 8-13.

14 World Council of Churches’ Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, 2018, “The Arusha Call to Discipleship,” *International Review of Mission*, 107.2 (407), (December, 2018): 542.

15 Petros Vassiliadis, “Joining in with the Spirit in the 21st Century: A Response to Dana Robert,” given at the celebration of the completion of the Regnum Books series on the Edinburgh 1910 Centenary, Oxford, September 4, 2015. This paper, to my knowledge, has never been published, but Dr. Vassiliadis very kindly sent me a manuscript copy of his paper, after I heard him deliver it in person at the Oxford celebration.

16 Cristian Sonea, “The Liturgy after the Liturgy and Deep Solidarity: The Orthodox Understanding of Christian Witness and Its Implications for Human Society,” *Mission Studies*, 37 (2020): 466-68.

Interculturality

The SVD 2018 General Chapter stated: “Moved by the Spirit of Jesus, we build our communities interculturally when we experience relationships of trust, openness, co-responsibility, mutuality and fraternity. Striving to live as truly intercultural communities is already a key element of our SVD mission.”¹⁷ How, however, is interculturality connected with *Trinitarian* life and mission?

One powerful way of thinking about mission is to connect it with the completion of creation. God’s mission, in which Christians are called to participate, is a commitment to work with God in continuing and completing God’s dream of creation’s full flourishing. Israel was called to work with God in bringing about a blessing for all nations (Gen 12:3), a blessing expressed so beautifully especially by the prophet Isaiah (see, for example, Is 2:2-5; 11:1-9).¹⁸ Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, expressed this vision in the “manifesto” of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:16-16-21). He spoke of it, as Mark reports (1:15), as the imminent coming of the reign of God—a term that might be better rendered as the “Kingdom of God,” or in the wonderful phrases of Willie Jennings and Gregory Boyle, God’s reign of “revolutionary intimacy,” and “radical kinship.”¹⁹ At the heart of his vision was intercultural harmony and energy.

Jesus of Nazareth, like us in all things but sin (Heb 2:17; 4:15), was thoroughly a Jew, with all the Jewish prejudices about foreigners and non-Jews, but, as Argentinian New Testament writer Adriana Milmanda, SSpS, argues, Jesus was able to overcome his prejudices as he encounters the Canaanite / Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28; Mk

7:24-29) who so desperately needed his help. Her desperation awakened Jesus’ compassion. He “listens to her. He comes to his senses and remembers who and what he is. ... This woman, in her weakness and need, shows Jesus God’s dream for humanity. ... He listens to the Spirit, awakening in his humanity God’s all-inclusive and humanitarian dream.”²⁰ What a marvelous portrait of Trinitarian mission in action! We might imagine that this powerful encounter with a person of another culture inspired Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine offers a stunning commentary on the radicality of the parable with a powerful, present-day analogy: “The man in the ditch is an Israeli Jew; a rabbi and a Jewish member of the Israeli Knesset fail to help the wounded man, but a member of Hamas shows him compassion.”²¹ Pope Francis, concluding his reflection on the parable in Chapter Two of his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, links its message with the triune God: “believers come to know that God loves every man and woman with infinite love and ‘thereby confers infinite dignity’ upon all humanity. ... If we go to the ultimate source of that love which is the very life of the triune God, we encounter in the community of the three divine Persons the origin and perfect model of all life and society.”²²

Francis’s words point to an important move in Trinitarian theology, first articulated by Karl Rahner in more formal theological language, but later expressed by Catherine LaCugna, interpreted by Kathleen Cahalan, in language that is more accessible: “who God is in essence is what God does.”²³ What

17 Statement of the General Chapter, 2018, 3.2, 27,

<https://www.svdcuria.org/members/histtrad/gchapter/gc2018/docs/1808docen.htm>.

18 For a powerful elaboration of the mission of Israel, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 191-264.

19 Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2017), 29; Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 187-212; *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

20 Adriana Carla Milmanda, SSpS, “The Intercultural Journey of Jesus,” in ed. Maria Cimperman, RSCJ and Roger P. Schroeder, SVD, *Engaging Our Diversity: Interculturality and Consecrated Life Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 70.

21 Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 149.

22 Pope Francis, Encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (FT), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, 85.

23 Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010), 149, referring to Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for*

this means is that, as we see God at work in Jesus, inspired by the Spirit, we get an understanding of who God is in God's deepest reality—working to realize the divine dream of “radical kinship” among all peoples, and with the whole of creation. This working for community reveals the secret of what God is in God's self: a community, a relationship of radical equality, dialogue, and sharing, a model for the human task of interculturality that will realize God's dream for creation. How God works in the world for “radical kinship,” through Jesus of Nazareth, through the Holy Spirit, is described in classical theology as God in Godself being community of radical equality and diversity in unity. God is what God does: “At the heart of holy mystery is not monarchy but communion; not absolute rule, but threefold *koinonia*.”²⁴ Trinity is the mystery of Love Giving Everything, calling us to do the same with one another.



(Photo by Santiago Saucedo from Pexels)

Us: *The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperOne, 1991), 411. Rahner's famous phrase is “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and vice-versa.” See his *The Trinity* (New York: Continuum, 1970), for example, 21-24, 82-103.

24 Johnson, *She Who Is*, 216.

We see this call for equality and diversity among ourselves in the great story in Acts 10 of the “conversion of Peter,” as Justo González calls it.²⁵ Peter does what could be called something unthinkable. He accepts a non-Jew, a member of the army that is occupying his country, into the Jesus community, and actually eats with Cornelius and his family. Peter's conversion, as well as that of Cornelius, was clearly a work of the Spirit that fell upon him and his household. “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:47-48). Several chapters later, when doubts were raised about the superiority of Jewish culture over that of Greek understandings of Christianity in Antioch, the Spirit of Jesus was at work again. As the letter sent to the Antioch community stated that “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28).

Sometimes the famous verse from Gal 3:28 is strongly critiqued. I recently heard tell of an Aboriginal woman who said that she thought it was the most oppressive verse in the Bible since it erased differences, calling for assimilation into the culture of the West.²⁶ I think we need, rather, to interpret it in the light of Paul's insistence that the unity in Christ the verse attests to—no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—is the unity in diversity that the Spirit of Christ creates. This is attested to in 1Cor 12: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord.” Intercultural living is intimately tied to mission, as the statement from the SVD 2018 General Chapter insists. However, missiologist Andrew Walls's interpretation is also powerful and challenging for us in terms of intercultural

25 Justo L. González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Holy Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 134.

26 This was a remark made in a Webinar on “Apostolicity and Intercultural Theology,” sponsored by the Overseas Ministries Study Center, Princeton, NJ, given by John G. Flett on January 14, 2021.

living. He speaks of an “Ephesian Moment” when two cultures—Greek and Jewish—succeeded to live together in a mutually enriching and challenging way. Neither “was a form of Christian faith complete and valid in itself, apart from the other. Each was necessary to the other, each was to complete and correct the other; for each was an expression of Christ under certain specific conditions, and Christ is humanity completed.”²⁷ I don’t think that we can get a better description of a Trinitarian-grounded life of interculturality than this. The Love that Gives Everything calls us to a life of loving and giving as we live with one another and work for the “revolutionary intimacy” of God’s Kingdom.

Inculturation

What is always important as we reflect on the Trinity is to cultivate a healthy apophatic sense. We need to know that we are dealing with mystery, and that any language we use is more untrue than it is true. The American poet Christian Wiman speaks of God as “my bright abyss.”²⁸ One of my favorite poems of Rainer Maria Rilke reads:

*We must not portray you in king’s robes,
you drifting mist that brought forth the
morning.*

*Once again from the old paintboxes
we take the same gold for scepter and crown
that has disguised you through the ages.*

*Piously we produce our images of you
till they stand around you like a thousand
walls.*

*And when our hearts would simply open,
our fervent hands hide you.*²⁹

27 Andrew F. Walls, “The Ephesian Moment,” in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 78.

28 Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss: Meditation of a Modern Believer* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2013); “2047 Grace Street,” in *Hammer is the Prayer: Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2016), 100.

29 Rainer Maria Rilke, “Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen,” in *Rilke’s Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New

York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 50.

30 Denise Levertov, “The Beginning of Wisdom,” in *The Stream and the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes*, (New York: New Directions, 1997), 29 (28-29); William Cleary, *We Side with the Morning: Daily Prayers to the God of Hope* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2009), Prayer for November 8 (no pagination).

31 Johnson, *She Who Is*, 200, 201. The middle quotation is from Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Preface to Question 3.

32 Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 128.

33 Graham Kings, “Matter of Great Moment,” in *Nourishing Connections* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2020), 4.

But this does not mean that we must remain speechless, nor does it mean that our language about God is totally meaningless. This is because, from the first moment of creation, the moment of the Big Bang, the Spirit has been present and active, pointing to the holiness of all that is. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, “Because the Holy Ghost over the bent / World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”³² Language of God is not meaningless, because, as Graham Kings writes, “For God, matter matters: for the Word became flesh.”³³ As my friend and former professor David Burrell once said in class, our language about God is like an arrow: it never hits the bull’s eye, but it does hit the target.

York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 50.

30 Denise Levertov, “The Beginning of Wisdom,” in *The Stream and the Sapphire: Selected Poems on Religious Themes*, (New York: New Directions, 1997), 29 (28-29); William Cleary, *We Side with the Morning: Daily Prayers to the God of Hope* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2009), Prayer for November 8 (no pagination).

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33 Graham Kings, “Matter of Great Moment,” in *Nourishing Connections* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2020), 4.

Both these truths—that we cannot speak of God directly, but can indeed speak of God, as Elizabeth Johnson says, “allusively”—are the Trinitarian grounds of inculturation. God is Love Giving Everything. We can’t ever take it all in. But Love Gives *Everything*, and so *anything* is able to reflect the mystery—as long as we are aware of language’s, images’, and rituals’ limitations. The ineffable mystery of God and the sacramental nature of God’s world allows us to be creative, daring, innovative in our theologies and liturgies, our teaching, and our witnessing to and proclaiming the gospel. Our bodies, our cultures, our social locations, our history are all shot through with the Spirit’s presence, with the holiness of the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth, now the Risen Christ, whose body, like ours, like every rock, like every drop of water, has its origin, as Denis Edwards beautifully puts it, in stardust.³⁴ Love Gives Everything, and Everything is the stuff of speaking about God—not ever adequately, but always truly.

Justice and Peace

SVD Constitution 112 commits SVDs “to fostering unity and justice and to overcoming egoism and the abuse of power. We consider it our duty to promote justice according to the gospel in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.” Our 2018 General Chapter emphasized that “St. Arnold Janssen believed that nature is the temple of God in which God placed us so that it would proclaim to us God’s existence. As transforming missionary disciples, stewardship of God’s creation is our responsibility in expressing God’s love.”³⁵ In sum, you are called to be prophets of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in our world, and in this you are rooted in our Trinitarian God, who is as such a community of justice and flourishing, and who works for justice and peace in all of creation.

The Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff reflects on this aspect of the triune God by starting with what Kathleen Cahalan and Catherine LaCugna call God’s *essence*—that is, God in Godself. For Boff, in the beginning is not the One but the Three-in-One, a communion, a perfect community of perfect equality and sharing, the pattern for justice and peace in the world.³⁶ As Elizabeth Johnson comments, this reality of unity and diversity in communion—Love Giving Everything—is the “origin, mediator, and driving force of liberation,” where “there is total equality amid mutuality and respect for difference. ... It lays the foundation for a liberated society of equal brothers and sisters, critiques patterns of unjust domination [domination of any sort, over human sisters and brothers, or over animate and inanimate creation] and offers a source of inspiration for change.”³⁷

How do we know God is like this? Because of God’s actions in history—again, what God *is* in God’s deepest self is what God *does*. The entire history of Israel attests to God working for true justice and *shalom*, despite so much violence in that history. Dianne Bergant suggests that the famous Johannine phrase “God so loved the world” (Jn 3:16) refers not only to humans, but to the entire cosmos, which God saw as “very good” (Gen 1:31) and appointed humanity as its protectors and caretakers.³⁸ As we are bidden in Ps 148, “praise God from the heavens, praise God in the heights! / ... for God commanded and they were created, / God established them forever and ever; / God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed” (1, 5b-6). Rather than dominate the earth, human beings are called, as Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel expressed it beautifully, to be “cantors of the universe.”³⁹ The prophetic tradition—think of Amos, Isaiah, and Micah in particular—is a

34 Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 13-15.

35 SVD Constitutions, 112,

<https://www.svdcuria.org/members/svddocs/const/en/consten.pdf>; Statement of the General Chapter, 2018, 3.4.2, 44.

36 See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

37 Johnson, *She Who Is*, 208.

38 See Dianne Bergant, *A New Heaven, A New Earth: The Bible and Catholicity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 1, 3.

39 See Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 278, quoting Abraham Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God* (New York: Scribner, 1954), 82.

tradition calls Israel “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). Elizabeth Johnson insists that such prophetic call for justice includes injustice done to humans and the renewal of a “disordered world,” something the prophets, a message the prophets “announced with equal vigor.”⁴⁰ In the New Testament we see Jesus anointed by the Creator Spirit to bring liberty to captives and freedom for the oppressed (see Lk 4:18), embodying in his life, demonstrating by his healings, and proclaiming with his words the “revolutionary intimacy” of God’s dream.

Jesus’ parable in Matt 25 about the “sheep and the goats” may be interpreted as a call to charity, not justice. But it also points to the basic human dignity of all peoples that is the foundation of working for a just and peaceful world. The passage I quoted earlier from Pope Francis’s *Fratelli Tutti* also links this text with the Trinity, and his comment that the Trinitarian community is “the origin and perfect model of all life and society”⁴¹ reads like a reference to Boff’s ideas referred to by Elizabeth Johnson. Francis goes on in the next paragraph of the encyclical to wonder “why, in the light of this, it took so long for the church to condemn slavery and various forms of violence.” He goes on to condemn “violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different.”⁴²

One more of Jesus’ parables in particular, in a feminist interpretation offered by New Testament scholar Barbara Reid, reveals God as a God of justice: the parable of the “persistent widow” in the gospel of Luke (Lk 18:1-8). Often the unjust judge in the parable is seen as an image of God who needs to be approached with persistent prayer, or the parable *contrasts* the judge to the mercy of God. Both interpretations are in accordance with Luke’s redaction of the parable in verses 1 and 7. However, as Reid argues, both interpretations offer a rather unattractive image of God as a tyrant on the one hand and

one reluctant to answer on the other. Because of this, she suggests that the original parable is not about prayer at all, but about *God’s* persistent quest for justice. God, she argues, is imaged as the woman and injustice is imaged as the judge. With this interpretation, “with its unusual characters and startling ending,” the parable “jolts the hearer into a new way of seeing. It asks one to leave behind stereotypes and what justice in the realm of God looks like and how it is achieved. It invites one to emulate such a pursuit of justice in efforts to embody the reign of God here and now while awaiting future fulfillment.”⁴³ Once again we see Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, revealing God as a God who never gives up in the pursuit of radical kinship and justice—and invites those who believe in such a God to join in the work.

Conclusion: Joining in the Dance

In the same webinar in which the presenter shared the comments of the Australian Aboriginal woman about Gal 3:28, the presenter, John Flett, told a wonderful story of a visit to a (Protestant) church service in the Congo. At a certain point in the service all the people in the church began to dance. Now dancing is very common in African church services, but the point in the service in which this dance took place was unfamiliar, and so John asked his host what was going on. “Oh,” his host responded. “They are dancing the creed. We have just discovered it, so it is quite a joyful moment in the service.” John was quite surprised. The people had *just* discovered the creed? How was that possible? He opened up the service book—several years old—and showed his host the text of the Nicene Creed. “Oh, yes,” his host responded again. “Yes, we have known about the text for a long time, but it only became the creed for us when we began to dance it.”

40 Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 280.

41 FT 85.

42 FT 86.

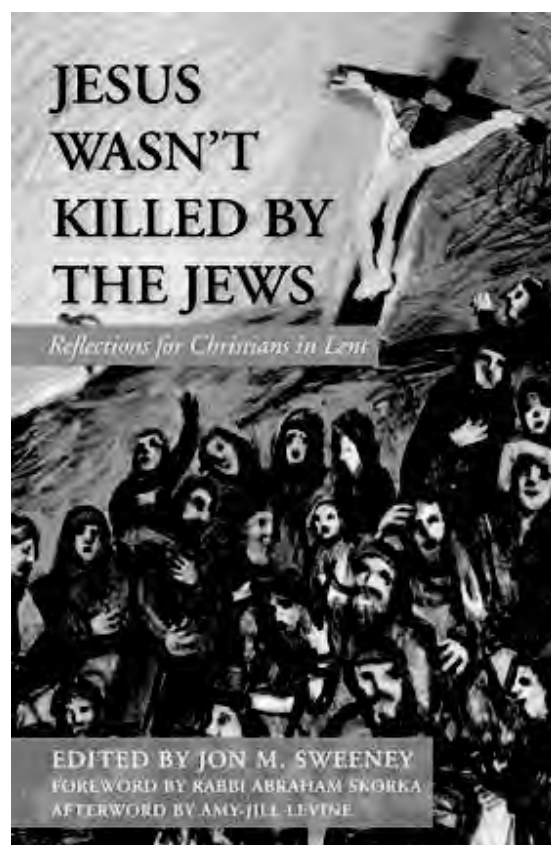
43 Barbara E. Reid, *Parables for Preachers, Year C* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 233.

I think, in a metaphorical sense of course, this is how we discover the Trinity in our own lives: we join The Divine Dance, as Richard Rohr has called it, a play on words that is derived from the more formal term *perichoresis*, an interrelation, an interweaving that expresses the Trinity's intimate unity but clear difference from one another. We join the dance as we begin to engage in mission; practice, succeed, and make mistakes in a life of interculturality; risk new ways of thinking about and communicating the gospel in inculturation; and struggle with and for the poor and marginalized and the hurting earth in working for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. We join the dance as we work at joining our God who is Love Giving Everything, the dance itself. Mission, Interculturality, Inculturation, and Justice and Peace interweave with one another in a kind of dance that portrays "the mutual indwelling and encircling of God's holy mystery,"⁴⁴ and our participation in it. Johnson imagines it as a modern piece of choreography, where "dancers whirl and intertwine in unusual patterns; the floor is circled in seemingly chaotic ways; rhythms are diverse; at times all hell breaks loose; resolution is achieved unexpectedly." Johnson takes the metaphor in another direction: "we can say that the eternal flow of life is stepped to the contagious rhythms of spicy salsas, merengues, calypsos, or reggaes where dancers in free motion are yet bonded by the music."⁴⁵ And in the dance, like the African Christians in the Congo, we discover the creed: "I believe in on God ... Creator ... Word made flesh ... Life-giving Spirit."

The great fourteenth century poet Hafez was a Muslim, not a Christian, but I think we can borrow his words to end this reflection on the Trinity and our commitment to participating in the life of the God who gives everything to us and to creation:

*Every child has known God.
Not the God of names,
Not the God of don'ts
Not the God who [n]ever does anything
weird.
But the God who only knows
four words.
And ... keeps repeating them, saying:
"Come dance with me."
Come Dance.⁴⁶*

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⁴⁴ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 220.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 220-21.

⁴⁶ Hafez, "Every Child Has Known God," quoted in Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 14.